

Elections in Iraq

Adventurous journey to democracy



ARSHAD-UZ ZAMAN

By going for elections against all odds, President George Bush took a big gamble and from all accounts the gamble seems to have paid off.

The US along with her loyal ally Prime Minister Tony Blair of Britain have faced superhuman odds in Iraq for more than a year and half. When attacking Iraq nearly two years ago, the two leaders thought that it would be a cake-walk. The events were to prove how wrong they were. The Iraqis with the help of unseen allies put up a very credible resistance and it continues to this day. President Bush went to war along with Blair when the whole world criticised their action bitterly. The war in Iraq was the most important issue in the Presidential elections last November. President Bush faced the challenge of the Democrat contender and won.

There was big question mark about the elections. Whereas President went ahead virtually alone and faced the challenge of daily murders of Al Zarkawi and assorted organisations, who continued their daily campaign of bombing and assassination. Indeed the opponents of the elections declared a virtual Jihad against it. On election day as many as nine suicide bombers killed more than 20 including some Americans.

All this and more have failed to deter the Iraqis from going to the 5,500 polling stations country-wide. From unofficial statistics we learn that nearly 60 percent of Iraqis have voted across the

country. President Bush has expressed satisfaction at the result and has described it 'a great day for Democracy'. He has also thanked the European Union (EU) and the UN for their help. With the election victory firmly in the bag President Bush has taken the first step to mend fences with friends and allies with whom relations have been frosty.

Whereas the high participation of Iraqis in the elections is the real surprise, the result countrywide

has borne the brunt of the murderous conflict and they were fearful of attacks in the polling booths. In the south and the north what was repeatedly told was that they were voting for the first time since Saddam lived.

It is worth taking note of some of the prominent personalities that have emerged through Al-Sistani. It is when he gave the blessing for the election that the process started in right earnest. The second is Iyad Allawi, the Prime Minister

can legitimately claim a larger slice of the cake. The Kurds, who have found favour with the Americans and in fact invited them to Iraq, will want something better than autonomy. The Sunnis, who have been in the driver's seat for long cannot be denied their slice of the cake. In other words the power game may have already begun. For the Americans, who hold power now, they would be interested in an orderly 'exit strategy'. Since they are an impatient people they may not want to get too involved in the musical chair of Iraq politics.

According to the provisional document drawn up by the Americans, the National Assembly composed of 270 members, will elect one President and two Deputy Presidents. The President will name a Prime Minister, who will select his Cabinet. The main task of the Assembly will be to prepare a Constitution which will be voted by the Assembly by the middle of August. The entire process is due to be completed by the end of the year.

This time table looks pretty neat on paper. Yet it is certain that there is bound to be so much horse trading that the danger of the process derailing is real. The Shias will no doubt feel the pull from across the border -- Iran. The Kurds have long been clamouring for an independent state and their ambitions will have to be kept in check. There are more Kurds in Turkey than in northern Iraq. Iran and Syria have sizeable Kurdish population. None of these three states view favourably the emergence of a Kurdish state.

With what seems like free elections underwritten by American bayonets, Iraq has launched into a new adventurous journey called democracy. If the experiment succeeds it will bring a great novelty in the Middle East. For democratically elected regimes are unknown in the region. We all have to keep our fingers crossed to see what comes next.

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THE HORIZON THIS WEEK

There is a consensus emerging that power will have to be shared by the three regions. It is evident that in the new situation the Shias can legitimately claim a larger slice of the cake. The Kurds, who have found favour with the Americans and in fact invited them to Iraq, will want something better than autonomy. The Sunnis, who have been in the driver's seat for long cannot be denied their slice of the cake. In other words the power game may have already begun.

gives a divided verdict and this was to be expected. Iraq is divided roughly into predominantly Shia south who have nearly 60 percent of the total population, the Kurds in the north with a population of 15 to 20 percent and the rest Sunnis with 15 to 20 percent. It would be wise not to assume that the 14.2 million Iraqis live in water tight compartments in those regions for indeed they live amongst each other. For instance capital Baghdad has a very mixed population. It has been reported that in the south the voters turned out in large numbers -- with anything upto 80 percent and the number of women voters was remarkably high. Same was the picture in Kurdish north. It was in the Sunni majority centre of the country that the voter turn out appeared to be low. The reason is that for a year and half that area

ter of the Provisional Government installed by the US. He is Shia and is a leading a faction of Shias. The third is Gazi Al Awar, President of the Provisional Government and he is a Sunni. The fourth is Adnan Pachachi, an internationally known personality, who leads an Assembly of Independent Democrats. Then there are two well known Kurdish leaders, Jalal Talabani and Masud Barzani, who have joined hands to present a common slate. There is Ahmad Chalabi, who is a Shia banker and secular minded politician and at one time enjoyed the blessings of the Americans.

Quo Vadis? There is a consensus emerging that power will have to be shared by the three regions. Saddam Hussein ruled Iraq for several decades with an iron hand keeping the Shias and the Kurds from the seat of power. It is evident that in the new situation the Shias

WB ECONOMIST TALKS ON HIV/AIDS PREVENTION

Needed an aggressive programme involving all

The Daily Star recently spoke to World Bank's chief economist **Shantayanan Devarajan** who is based in South Asia Region. During his hour long exchange at a city guest house with **Inam Ahmed**, News Editor and **Naimul Haq**, Senior Staff Correspondent of The Daily Star, he explained how crucial it is to invest more fund in prevention of HIV/AIDS activities and country's leadership role. He was in the Bangladesh capital for a short visit.



Shantayanan Devarajan

The Daily Star (DS): Can you, sir, give us an overview of your assessment of the HIV/AIDS situation in Bangladesh. In fact, for a long time we have been hearing that Bangladesh could face a serious HIV outbreak.

Shantayanan Devarajan (SD): To the extent we have any data which is very patchy and often hard to substantiate, for Bangladesh it looks like that the prevalence rate of HIV currently is fairly low which is less than one percent among the risk behaviour groups.

I think it is no longer relevant just to look at current rate of HIV prevalence as much as what are the indicators that might lead one to be concerned that the epidemic may group up. Remember that all the African countries with HIV burden that today have roughly 25 percent prevalence rates had started out at 0.1 percent. In fact, I remember being there in South Africa when the HIV prevalence rate there was 0.1 percent.

And there I do have some concerns about Bangladesh. Because I see that the way HIV/AIDS have exploded in southern Africa has mostly to do with denial and stigma. And I see both of those essentially already present in Bangladesh. Any experience we learnt from the African lessons is that the leadership of that country continues to go into denial. This was the case of South Africa. The President Thabo Mvuyelwa Mbeki first kept denying when he first said he never knew who died of AIDS, and secondly, he kept saying that there is no relation between HIV and AIDS. And when you have that kind of mindset in the leadership it makes it very difficult for the people to implement some kind of prevention programme.

To the other side of HIV/AIDS is, it is very easy to prevent. Unlike other diseases if a disease is spread by human behaviour not like a mosquito that bites you and you cannot control. Here in the case of HIV transmission you take an action like unprotected sex.

So that is one side. The other side is the stigma. The stigma is also believed to be widespread in Africa where whole groups who were the ones who needed most protection and most help to prevent the HIV virus from spreading were the ones who got stigmatised most.

For instance, I see commercial sex workers (CSWs) and this is where my concern is about Bangladesh. Because there are say about one million rickshaw pullers and many of them stay away from their families who may buy sex. And there are some sporadic evidence that police here in Bangladesh pick the CSWs and one of the criteria they use to arrest them is if they (CSWs) carry any condom or not. Now if any of these groups are discouraged from using condom then we may have a serious problem in hand. And if that is the mindset as you said, apparently this could lead to an HIV/AIDS explosion.

DS: What we are more interested in is the economic cost of HIV/AIDS. We have noticed like in Brazil that the government has involved multiple ministries to address HIV/AIDS problem and they don't just see it narrowly as merely as a health issue. Having said that do you think

similar approach or strategies have been taken in South Asian countries? What should be the proper approach on this issue from World Bank's point of view?

SD: Well, there are two parts of that question. The first one is that the economic cost, which we haven't talked about yet, of the disease could be so large that it actually requires the attention of entire government to try to address in a large scale with some specific aspects of HIV/AIDS. Because AIDS unlike other diseases afflicts young adults and when it afflicts young adults it has effect not just on them but also on their children. And their children are less able to go to schools and they often become orphans when their parents die. This means it could lead to a whole generation of orphans who are under-educated or less educated than their parents were and they in turn are less able to take care of their children. So their children would be even less educated so you can have a whole generation who are less educated. Remember education is the human capital it is the engine of long-term economic growth, with it you could actually have a big impact on the growth of the economy. In South Africa some simulation we did shows that if the economy otherwise was growing at three percent a year it could actually go the other way -- start declining down to a point where in about three generations in 80 years it could be about two thirds of the size where it started. That's huge, it's a major, major cost of AIDS in a country.

Now, on the other side, its not something absorbing now. Even more important is that the economy could be growing reasonably well now but not far into the future and we could seriously be making mistake by ignoring.

What you should do now is to act. Because, I believe Bangladesh has the opportunity to act now. This is the time to act. Because when it gets too big you cannot do it. You can not control it. In South Africa we have five million people infected with HIV virus. Even if you were to treat all of them at about one dollar per head it would cost you five billion dollar a year.

DS: Can you give us a worst case scenario and what could be Bangladesh situation at that point?

SD: Well, typically around one percent prevalence rate of the total population is considered epidemic for any population. Once the disease reaches above that one percent then it starts spreading into other population or in other words the general population. This means the HIV infection is no longer restricted among the risk behaviour group and the general population is at risk and this is the take off point for HIV as observed in other countries. The consequences is huge, of course, on the health sector.

Coming back to the multi-sector approach -- what this means is that if we want to act early we don't just act on the health sector, we need to

come out of this narrow focus, for instance, on the education sector. Because as I said earlier, orphans do not get enough skills so educating them could be a good investment in terms of developing human resources.

Then we also need to focus and act on the young adults because they are the most vulnerable group in the population. And so we need to talk to them about safe sex, the education on this issue is very vital or we could leave the battle right there.

You need leadership from the very top, the head of state to come out like in Uganda leaders talk about HIV/AIDS in almost every single speech they deliver. In fact, Uganda is one of the success stories where they have managed to reverse the epidemic. And in India the Prime Minister Manmohan Singh has taken over the leadership becoming the chairman of the National AIDS Committee in India.

Even the finance ministers need to turn their focus on HIV/AIDS issues to understand how important it is to invest in prevention activities and if we don't spend money now we could end up with economy shrinking.

DS: What has the role of the World Bank recently in combating the HIV/AIDS epidemic globally?

SD: We developed a facility in Africa called MAP, which stands for Multi Sector Aids Programme. It is basically a programme where a country has to come up with a feasible AIDS programme and if we in the Bank think it is feasible then we just give them the money.

The other role we are now playing is to get the leadership in the countries to get as much attention as possible -- its rather an advocacy job we are now focusing on because we believe leadership is very crucial in addressing the problem and to stop the epidemic where it is now.

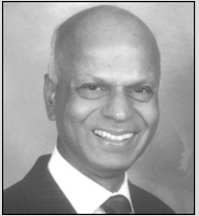
DS: Do you not think for country like Bangladesh having such a small number of people living with HIV (PLWHA) to focus more on the treatment than prevention?

SD: Normally there is this debate over prevention and treatment. And its true prevention is more cost effective than treatment. On the other hand, Bangladesh has an opportunity here because the number of cases is so small that you can actually treat all of them and have hundred percent treatment for them all now. At the same time have an aggressive prevention programme that would involve all spheres of the society -- the women's group, children's group, youth's group and so on. In fact, you have an advantage, this is a country of NGOs who can drive the issues to the grassroots while the government acts as a policy maker and a catalyst.

DS: Thank you very much, sir, for your time.

SD: Thank you as well.

An uncertain future for European constitution



CHAKLADER MAHBOOB-UL ALAM writes from Madrid

FEBRUARY 20, 2005 is going to be a landmark date in not only the history of Spain but also of Europe. On that date Spain will be the first EU member-state to hold a referendum on the ratification of the European Constitution. According to recent opinion polls, some 58.8 per cent of the Spaniards are still undecided about how they will vote and approximately 30 per cent of the Spanish voters are even unaware of this important political event. The same opinion poll also found the would-be voters' knowledge of the 455-article constitution was very poor. Many constitutional experts consider that it is an unnecessarily long and complex document. The politicians across the continent are afraid that public apathy will lead to a low turnout in Spain on the polling day. They are still brooding over the low turnout of 46 per cent in the European Parliamentary elections in June 2004. Now, the obvious question is: Why is this referendum so important for Spain and the European Union?

A little history first. The search for an integrated European Union owes its origin to the age-old intense rivalry between Germany and France, which caused two World Wars in the 20th century with devastating consequences. In order to build a bridge between France and Germany and to lessen the risk of another Franco-German war, in May 1950, a French civil servant called Jean Monnet and the then French Foreign Minister, Robert Schuman put forward the idea of a new framework for western Europe. An independent supranational authority to administer a common market for coal and steel --two items then considered as absolutely essential for all war efforts-- was set up in 1951 by France, West Germany, Italy and three Benelux countries. The members of this semi-federal organisation, called the European

Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) agreed to abolish all customs barriers and discriminatory practices affecting these two commodities. Although the immediate objectives were economic, some influential French and German politicians nourished the idea of an eventual political integration of the member states.

Today, after almost fifty-five years, the goal of political integration of Europe still looks distant. But what has been achieved in the fields of business and commerce

Europe is based on "pooled sovereignty, the primacy of international institutions and law, the exaltation of peace, an inviolable secularism, a shared currency and a value system equating death penalty with barbarism and free health care with civilisation". "Europe", according to Reid, "is at a point in its history where making aggressive war is considered passe", an outdated relic along the lines of burning at the stake or a medieval joust".

So it is argued that if not for

resistance.....because it has a strong symbolic value and reinforces the document's political dimension".

Besides consolidating the treaties and protocols which often overlap each other, the proposed constitution streamlines its cumbersome decision-making process to accommodate its recent expansion. It also introduces some new provisions, which in my opinion, are definite improvements on the current situation. It creates the position of a full-time president for a renewable term of two and a half years. This will do

LETTER FROM EUROPE

It may also open up the possibility of two-tier or three-tier membership systems. Those who ratify the constitution will try to form a more integrated inner club with the possibility of some kind of supra-national political integration at a later stage provided the United States can be convinced that such a political entity will not go against its interests. (According to some political observers, in 1991, an attempt to launch a project called the Confederation of Europe by Francois Mitterand and Vaclav Havel was nipped in the bud by Bush senior.)

during this period was most probably beyond the imagination of the founding fathers. True, it has been a slow process but a steady one indeed. Today, the European Union is composed of 25 member-countries. Bulgaria, Romania and Croatia are expected to join the Union soon. If Europe can overcome its prejudices against Islam, Turkey will eventually become a member. There is a thriving common currency called the Euro, which is controlled by an independent European Central Bank. Despite slow economic growth in recent years, the fact remains that the EU has created an economic common market which is much larger than that of the United States.

Then, of course, there are the well-established organs of government like the Council of Europe, the Council of Ministers, the Commission (the executive body which proposes and administers EU laws), the European Parliament, the Court of Justice etc. Although a political integration of Europe still looks distant, a major armed conflict among the major European powers seems impossible. While reviewing a recently published book called The United States of Europe, written by T.R. Reid, the book reviewer (Roger Cohen) pointed out that the idea of a united

anything else but for the continued peace, economic prosperity and a high standard of social welfare, the Spaniards and the inhabitants of other member-states of the European Union should give a massive "yes" to the proposed constitution. After all, "greater economic, political and military integration will give them (the Europeans) far greater powers than they could ever achieve separately, whether to increase their prosperity, combat terrorism, extend the rule of law or serve as a counterweight to the United States". (International Herald Tribune) Since the constitution needs unanimous ratification by member-states, the politicians across the continent are afraid that a low turnout in Spain on 20th February, 2005 will have a negative influence on similar consultations in other countries.

If the prospects for having a politically integrated Europe are still remote, why do we keep calling this 455-article document as a constitution? Actually, this long and complicated document tries to consolidate a number of treaties written over a period of fifty years which have so far guided the workings of the Union. As explained by Josep Borrell, the president of the 732-member European Parliament, "the word Constitution was adopted gradually, despite

away with the current six-monthly turn-based system which has proved to be rather ineffective. There will also be a foreign minister of the Union to conduct the EU's "common foreign and security policy". The constitution also authorises the establishment of the office of a European Public Prosecutor. The European Parliament will have the powers to legislate in more areas than ever. Despite considerable pressure from conservative groups and the Vatican to refer specifically to Europe's supposed Christian roots alone, the constitution maintains a secular profile, which in my opinion, is not a mean achievement in the current international environment of religious hatred and intolerance created by Bush and his fundamentalist acolytes. For the first time the constitution introduces a Charter of Fundamental Rights for all the citizens of the Union.

Of course, the constitution has got its detractors as well. It has come under heavy criticism from labour unions who think that the constitution lacks a good social policy. In their opinion, the European Union only caters for the interests of the businessmen and financial institutions. There is some truth in this criticism. But the politicians point out that the constitution has been the product of patient negotiations among member-states who at this stage do not want to commit huge funds for this purpose. But they feel that a good overall social policy will come gradually. It is inter-

esting to note that countries like Sweden which have some of the most advanced social systems in the world have been against the idea of endorsing a generous policy for the European Union as a whole.

As mentioned before, to come into effect, the constitution requires ratification by all its 25 member-states. So a crucial question is: What will happen if some countries vote "no"? The answer is not very clear. But it seems that these countries will be given a second opportunity as it was given to Denmark in the case of the Maastricht Treaty and to Ireland in the case of the Nice Treaty. If a country persists in not ratifying the constitution, it may eventually have to get out of the Union. Although, in principle, it appears to be a simple solution to such an impasse, in reality, it is not going to be that simple. If a small country does not ratify the constitution, and is allowed to leave the club, the European Union will, no doubt, survive.

It may also open up the possibility of two-tier or three-tier membership systems. Those who ratify the constitution will try to form a more integrated inner club with the possibility of some kind of supra-national political integration at a later stage provided the United States can be convinced that such a political entity will not go against its interests. (According to some political observers, in 1991, an attempt to launch a project called the Confederation of Europe by Francois Mitterand and Vaclav Havel was nipped in the bud by Bush senior.) The others will be governed by the terms of the Treaty of Nice.

Actually, the idea of progressing at different speeds towards full membership has already been accepted, in practice, by the Union because there are members who have subscribed to the single European currency while others have not. Even if a country of the size and military importance of the UK decides not to ratify the constitution, --a referendum is likely to take place in the UK in 2006 -- the Union, although weakened by the possible withdrawal of the UK, will survive. But what will happen if France or Germany does not ratify the constitution? Will it throw everybody back to the Treaty of Nice, (which in any case will continue to remain in force until 2009) or to new negotiations? These difficult issues cast a shadow of uncertainty over the proposed constitution which, I am afraid, will not be lifted in the near future.

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